A CONFESSION OF HERESY

THOMAS J. HARDY

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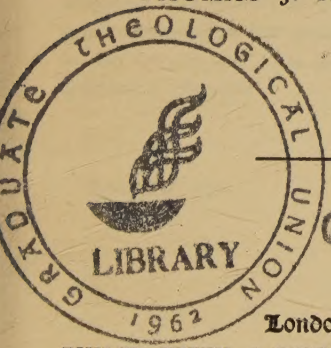
A Confession of Heresy

AND

A Plea for Frankness

BY

THOMAS J. HARDY, B.A.



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PREFACE.

THE Author has been induced to make the following pages public, not because they contain anything new, but because they have been privately deemed helpful in focussing a certain amount of liberal religious thought in the lay and clerical mind of to-day.

They are based on an address delivered before the members of a Men's Discussion Class, and with the exception of a number of queries and objections which were considered on that occasion and are now included in the text, no alteration has been made in their unpretentious character.

T. J. H.

September, 1901.

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A CONFESSION OF HERESY AND A PLEA FOR FRANKNESS.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

As this is the last occasion for sometime on which we shall all meet together, I wish to acquaint you with a matter of very great concern to myself, and one which, judging from the interest and confidence you have shown me, I believe to be not without importance to you.

It relates to a step, the possibility of which I have foreseen for some time, and which I have now, after long and serious reflection, decided to take. I am about to sever my connection with the Church of England.

To some of you this will hardly be a

surprise, but our standpoints are so varied that others will scarcely have perceived the drift of many of our discussions or the logical inference of my opinions. Such being the case I hesitated at first whether I ought to announce the step to you beforehand, but the alternative silence seemed to invite much misconstruction, and I am unwilling, after the confidence you have so fully shown me, that you should hear of my decision at second-hand. During the months I have been silent, you, though quite in the dark as to the reasons of my silence, have still given me your confidence, and I feel the time has now come to return that confidence and speak my mind as unreservedly as I can.

This I feel able to do all the more freely because, though we met in the first instance as members of the Church of England, we have tried to keep an open mind on all questions, and have discussed the most fundamental subjects without more regard for received opinion than that which we accord

opinion generally. I am therefore in no way apprehensive of unsettling your minds, or sowing your path with difficulties, and I shall be perfectly frank both as to my own convictions, and the reasons why I believe them to be incompatible with the creed and temper of ecclesiastical Christianity.

I need scarcely say that my secession is not caused by disagreement with the Church's organization—or want of it. That the Church of England is in a deplorable state of mismanagement and that from its present anomalous nature it seems vain to hope for the introduction of order and discipline, are facts about which I imagine there can be no dispute. Yet patent as these faults are, they ought not to lessen the devotion of a true man, who, the more he realized the abuses of the institution he served would the more endeavour to do his small part towards remedying them. The disorganization of an army does not justify desertion. I allude to them, however, in

passing, because I believe that the *laissez faire* policy on which these abuses thrive is the direct outcome of that disregard for consistency, that acquiescence in the spirit of compromise, that 'want,' as Matthew Arnold called it 'of intellectual seriousness' that reigns in the domain of dogma and creed. It is here that I come to the real parting of the ways, and to the reasons that prompt my action.

The old order changeth.—We are all aware that a great change has come over the way in which the average educated man regards nature, mankind, the future, and all objects of thought which are factors in the religious synthesis. The movement of more recent generations has carried to farther issues the work begun by the Reformation four hundred years ago. The Reformation, viewed in its relation not merely to Englishmen but to humanity, was a struggle between Authority and individual judgment, and its logical outcome was entire freedom

of thought. That outcome, however, was complicated by many side issues, and finally —so far as religion was concerned—was 'hung up' in a compromise between total submission and freedom of thought. For a long time this compromise took the form of submission to a Book instead of a system, until the modern movement assailed the Book as Protestantism had assailed the system, and the issue which for two hundred years had been obscured again shone clear.

It would be interesting to follow in outline the course of events from that time—I mean from the publication in 1833 of Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, which appears to mark the reawakening of 'intellectual seriousness' in this country. Such a project is, of course, far too long for my present purpose. I can but assume that the inquiries of science, philosophy, and historical criticism that speedily followed the publication of that epoch-making book are legitimate, that their advances must therefore be contemplated

without fear, and the freest opportunity accorded to them.

The need for candour.—But whether you will grant the assumption or no, two things are clear : it is quite impossible to check the rapid advance of knowledge, and it is equally impossible to pretend that the differences between the results of that advance and the old statements of Theology are not at variance. To be sure, the work of 'reconciliation' can always be affected by investing words and phrases with a meaning they do not ordinarily bear, but it seems to me the time has come for men who have any convictions at all to utter them in terms the least capable of misconstruction. We live in a day of weak words and weaker action, and the fruits of 'reserve' and 'accommodation' in politics, society, and commerce are only too plainly visible. Without exaggeration, I believe we are in danger of losing the priceless inward legacy bequeathed to us by our national struggle for religious liberty,

of forgetting the rock whence we were hewn, and what manner of inspiration it was whereby we became living souls. Nothing more fatal can befall a great people on the precarious apex of material prosperity than to cripple expanding convictions by outgrown phrases, and reject the language of yesterday in all save that which most nearly concerns them. Ruskin has told us how Venice in her best days used the same architecture for church and mart alike; the same ought surely to apply to the architecture of thought. Religion is the consecrating spirit of life: it should wear the same garb as life; it should be infused, not kept apart. It may be fanciful, but I cannot help seeing, wherever there has been such a severance, the same unhealthy result as everywhere follows an infringement of the divine unity of the universe. But one thing I am sure is not fanciful; if we, as English people, come to feel that it does not really matter whether our words tally with our convictions—so far

as words can—and that, too, in the supreme realm of religious thought, then the tide has turned with us, and our greatness, so far from saving us from the Nemesis that invariably overtakes insincerity, will only heighten the tragedy of our fall. I take my stand on Whateley's words: '*It makes all the difference in the world whether we put truth in the first place or in the second place.*'

Use of the term 'Truth.'—A word as to that term 'truth'; I use it wholly to indicate a state of conviction. I do not imagine for a moment that my convictions (or anyone else's) represent '*the* truth.' Indeed I observe that people who claim to champion *the* truth usually do more than their fellows to promulgate error. You will find *the* truth in a variety of places—in the Church of Rome, at Exeter Hall, in the leading Nonconformist Churches. *Truth*, you will find only within yourselves—truth that 'makes free,' that gives vitality to purpose and strength to action:

Once read thine own breast right . . .
Man has no other light
Search he a thousand years.

'Truth,' then, is relative, and constituted as we are, always will be so: further, 'truth' is partial and incomplete. I do not regard the convictions I am about to state as in any way final. Growth implies change—in deed *is* change—and there is no life without growth. The man whose boast it is that he never changes merely indicates in which direction he is changing. I neither claim, then, to have found 'the truth' nor to have gained an unchanging position. At the same time 'truth' as a state of conviction is no less imperative than it was to those who with open Bible or uplifted cross, claimed to possess a monopoly of revelation and nobly perished rather than renounce their faith; it has only passed from symbol and letter to take up a more permanent residence in individual conviction.

Method adopted.—I will now try to indi-

cate, without further preamble, the change which the modern standpoint has made in my own convictions. We shall agree, I think, that the main elements in Modern Thought are summed up in the following three ideas :—

(1.) That of unity : or rather a clearer appreciation of what unity in the universe really implies.

(2.) That of uniformity.

(3.) The evolutionary hypothesis, as the logical outcome of unity and uniformity, and its application in nature, history, and society.

The best method, I think, will be to outline as briefly as possible what these ideas seem to involve, and leave you to deduce the difference between them and the theological standpoint. Nothing would be more unfair to my position than to lead you to suppose that I take up a merely negative attitude towards the doctrines of the Church. My position is far from negative. I am not

giving you reasons for dissent or secession, but for an attitude, a faith, a temper—call it what you will—differing so widely from ecclesiasiastical Christianity that the two appear to be altogether incompatible.

I.

WHAT IS IMPLIED BY UNITY IN THE UNIVERSE.

Let us consider, first of all, the convictions which result from the principle of unity in the Universe; from the belief that all that enters into the realm of knowledge is a manifestation of one immanent Being.

I cannot better express my conviction of what the word 'God' means to me than in the sublime language of Wordsworth:

> 'I have felt
> A presence that disturbed me with the joy
> Of elevated thought; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.'

I am not now engaged in stating reasons for my belief—except when such seem to be demanded by way of elucidation—as these do not affect the point at issue. But I may here say that I am fully aware that from a scientific point of view the conviction just expressed is not yet demonstrated. It has always impressed me that the leading ideas in the religious synthesis, the ideas of God and of Immortality are, as far as pure reason is concerned, assumptions. Ecclesiasticism makes much of this, and virtually says: 'We told you so, commit yourselves to reason, and you become agnostics,' and you remember how Mr. Leslie Stephen accepts the alternative and says : ' We take you at your word : we become agnostics.' That is a perfectly frank answer from one who wishes to

commit himself entirely to reason. My own reply to the dilemma of ecclesiasticism is that I do not so wish, and I deny that monopoly of unreason which the Church, in characteristic haste to separate the sheep from the goats, seems so anxious to claim. I refuse altogether to clip my convictions to the limit of verifiable knowledge: if I did, I should, as Professor Huxley long ago pointed out, get no further than '*cogito*'—not even as far as '*ergo sum*'—and the prospect of going through life on a repetition of '*cogito*' is not exhilarating. I see no reason why I should not leave a margin for 'intuitional' convictions, indeed, as it is not in my power to shake such off, I must perforce do so. But that is a very different thing from accepting the Church's peremptory invitation, and identifying myself with what it terms *The* Faith.

The kind of belief voiced in Wordsworth's lines is in harmony with, though not a deduction from, scientific conclusions. Science speaks of 'force,' the poet of

'A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought.'

Both conceptions exclude the old difference between 'kind' and 'degree,' and render the terms 'divine' and 'human,' 'natural' and 'supernatural' mere categories of convenience. It is remarkable, however, how many people draw inspiration from the poet's conception, and yet go on employing the old terms. I have heard, for example, the above lines, and others with a similar bearing, quoted with fervour from the pulpit immediately after the recitation of a creed which implies, if it imply anything, that the 'human' and 'divine' are separated by a gulf which has only once been bridged. This, I suppose, is what Arnold meant by 'that lack of intellectual seriousness' which he laid at our doors. As one who must plead guilty to the offence, I can only explain it by itself, that is to say, by admitting that we are not sensitive, without a good deal of reflection, to the mental jar afforded

by the incompatability of ideas. No one can 'seriously' repeat those lines of Wordsworth's, and thereafter intelligently recite the Apostles' Creed. To speak of the *only* Son of God is to postulate two distinct kinds, therefore two universes, therefore absurdity. It is to set rolling the mediatorial ball which may logically assume the dimensions of the intercession of the saints, and all the abuses attendant on an unrestricted imagination.

Anthropomorphism necessary.—To go back a moment; the difference between the scientific and the Wordsworthian—for lack of a better term—conceptions is expressed by the word 'personality.' Where science speaks simply of 'force,' the intuitionalist adds personality. The term is anthropomorphic, our only knowledge of personality being derived from our knowledge of each other. The conception of unlimited 'personality' is one which puts the mental apparatus out of gear. 'It is

high: we cannot attain unto it.' Yet side by side with this meaningless term 'infinite,' arises our desire to appeal to a higher being than ourselves. Why may we not rest in what has been called 'the religious consciousness,' a faculty that reaches its consummation in Jesus. Just as one goes for an exposition of the physical world to Newton and Darwin, so one turns for the spiritual to Jesus. Now, Jesus taught men to address the Life of the Universe as 'Father.' The term is anthropomorphic and metaphorical, and agrees well with the report that 'without a parable spake he not unto them.' Every word respecting the Universal Life must be figurative, and the application of the term 'Father' seems from every point of view a triumph of religious instinct.

Relationship with the Father.—After a careful study of all the words ascribed to Jesus, I do not find that he laid claim to be *essentially* other than man—*i.e.* viewing man as, in common with all existence,

a manifestation of the divine. There are passages where Jesus claims equality with 'the Father'; there are passages where he regards himself as inferior. This paradox I believe to have been the plain and only way of representing the relationship. Naturally, as nothing was so clearly his purpose as to declare and emphasize the real unity of God and man, he declared it, taking himself, but far from exclusively, as the type of that unity. But in his age, and for many subsequent ages, it was the fashion to think of Deity as dwelling apart from 'creation,' so that Christ's claim of equality with 'the Father' seemed tantamount to claiming for himself supernatural, non-human prerogatives, and so men raised about his person the very barriers which he strove to remove from between God and man. Thus, *e.g.* the famous theological dilemma arose *Aut Deus aut homo non verus*—a good example of the crude and peremptory temper of Ecclesiasticism. It never dawned upon

the Church that the whole purpose of Jesus was to emphasize the essential divineness of humanity—of all that is, the sparrows, the lilies, the human body, and so to consecrate the whole creation with the breath of a new life. It is easy to see what a blow such a conception must give to a church in very name exclusive. The Jews saw this very clearly, and expelled Jesus from the world as the grand heretic: ecclesiastical Christianity saw it no less clearly and anathematised the same belief wherever it revived. In guarding the 'claims' of Christ, theology has been going back upon his words and frustrating his purpose.

In the representative sense I can take up the language of Nicea and affirm that Jesus is 'very God of very God,' but not in the Nicene *sense*, for in that sense Jesus is supposed to differ essentially from his brethren, and to partake of a mysterious relationship with the Father from which all the rest of the race are excluded: in that

sense he is supposed (1) to have come into the world in a manner different from other men, (2) to have in some way provided 'satisfaction' for the sins of the whole world, (3) to have physically arisen after his death, (4) to have mysteriously withdrawn a physical body from human ken, (5) to be now engaged in interceding for mankind, and (6) to be about to return with stupendous circumstance to arraign the whole race past and present before his tribunal.

My reverence for Jesus was never greater than it is to-day,—of more profound and intimate feeling I need not speak—but the whole of the above conception—and I trust I have stated it fairly—is to my mind materialised and inadequate, and totally foreign to the plain and simple gospel story. Most of the items are repugnant to the principle of Uniformity, and I shall glance at them in a moment; but there is a more fundamental objection; if Jesus differed in kind from his brethren I fail to see the

moral significance of his example. If he were not in all points one of us, how could he have been 'tempted in all points like as we are,' and if not, of what conceivable value for us is the fact of his triumph over Self and the world and his harmony with the Supreme will.

His significance in the race.—You will naturally ask me: what is my own view of Christ's significance? I believe his unique value to consist in (1) his being the highest manifestation of indwelling deity (2) in his sublime interpretation of our religious consciousness (3) in the effect of his personality, life, and teaching on the conscience of mankind continually, raising the tone, and rendering us sensitive to higher and higher notes in the scale of progressive morality, (4) as such he is the ever-present judge of quick and dead, nor is there a moment when his throne is not set in the invisible realm of conscience with circumstance more awful than any that seized the imagination of the

Poet on volcanic Patmos. (5) I believe the significance of his death to be profound both as a pledge of his sincerity, and as the seal of that life of self-sacrifice to which he devoted himself. In such a life, and in the fact that he who lived it so loved us his brethren we have a source of the highest inspiration both for our individual lives, and for the hope of the Race.

This is my belief; but you will at once see how it excludes both belief in a Trinity and all idea of substitutionary sacrifice on the part of Christ.

Is it possible after this to go on reciting the Creeds with any shadow of sincerity?

II.

WHAT IS IMPLIED BY UNIFORMITY.

I NOW come to the group of religious ideas affected by the principle of Uniformity. This principle, viz., that events depend upon the natural sequence of cause

and effect, underlies not only all our understanding of Nature and therefore our progress, but is at the bottom of every act of will. In the conduct of their own affairs men have long proceeded on this assumption notwithstanding that they have admitted interruptions in the chain of sequence in matters religious. This curious inconsistency is partly due to the way in which religion has been separated from actual life, and partly to that 'lack of intellectual seriousness' which you must pardon me if I seem to emphasize unduly. No man would risk a hundred pounds on the hypothesis of a miracle happening to frustrate the causes of the depreciation of the stock. And if we are unwilling to recognize miracles in the province of ordinary affairs what sort of value can we attach to those affairs which we conceive to be subject to capricious interruption? Far higher is the ground taken by Professor Huxley in that remarkable letter to Kingsley: 'I know what I mean

when I say that I believe in the law of inverse squares, and I will not rest my life and my hopes upon weaker convictions.'

The Miraculous.—The subject of 'miracles,' however, is exceedingly intricate, and you will bear with me if I try to take pains to be clear as to what we really mean by 'miracle.' No doubt it would save time to say roundly that 'miracles do not happen,' but to say so would as little express my belief as to subscribe to the received opinion. Wholesale statements seldom help us. Nothing but an honest attempt to grapple with the facts at our disposal however paradoxical the result may appear, can in the long run advance us to worthier conclusions.

A Question of Definition.—By a 'miracle' may be meant an occurrence which we have *not yet* correlated with some one of the various groups of occurrences formulated as 'laws.' That there are such occurrences —many such—cannot be denied. Every fact that is not 'explained,' and for which

there is good evidence, is in this sense a 'miracle.' It cannot always remain so, since Uniformity presupposes that it must sooner or later fall into line with some sequence of cause and effect. In this way the falling of a body to the earth was a 'miracle' up to the time of Newton, and so was the difference between species till Darwin observed the tendency in species to depart indefinitely from their ancestors, and by taking count of the influence of environment explained the hypothesis known as Evolution.

But this is very different from a direct and 'capricious' interruption of natural uniformity, which I suppose is the ecclesiastical and popular sense in which 'miracle' is held. However beneficent the 'caprice,' if it be fact, then the whole universe is anarchy, and to talk about 'natural laws' is absurd. The outcome of a single miracle (in this sense) would in the long run mean demoralisation. And when we turn to the past, and view the effect of such a belief on the

childhood of the race, we see it resulting in distrust, superstition, and cruelty; and when we look around us on the backward races to-day, we see the same haphazard doctrine attended by sloth, ignorance, and fear.

But how are we to discern between a genuine isolated case and the spurious fruit of the imagination? The answer is obvious: the question of 'miracles' is entirely one of evidence. Where the evidence is indisputable the isolated occurrence which it supports must be accepted as fact, and we must patiently await its ultimate explanation.

The 'Miracles' of Jesus.—As the personality of Jesus differed in so marked a degree from any other it is not improbable that he stood possessed of knowledge and of the power knowledge brings in a greater degree than other men. This, I think, would account for several 'miraculous' occurrences attributed to him. We are daily learning more of that dim borderland between the material and the spiritual which is slowly

emerging in hypnotic and telepathic phenomena, and we have little conception of the possibilities of which our nature is capable when set free by intense spirituality and devotion to an unselfish purpose. The swift penetration that could read the hearts of men might conceivably diagnose and heal their maladies, and one who could remove the pangs of remorse by saying: 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' might even unlock with his will the paralysed nerve. In all this, however, I do not forget that I am in the region of conjecture, and all I can say positively about the majority of the 'miracles' ascribed to Jesus is that I see no reason for denying their genuineness.

The Virgin-birth.—But now take two examples of what I have called the spurious group. One of them is extremely important because the whole ecclesiastical scheme is based upon it: I refer to the supposed 'miraculous' birth of Jesus. The evidence for this is very different from that for the

'wonderful works' of Jesus. The latter are recorded with all the plainness of genuine circumstance, and appear to have been the natural outcome of his personality. The former is as obviously introduced as a 'marvel'; it occurs in the poetic portions of the narrative, and so strikes one as being an afterthought. Nor is it the only case of parthenogenesis on record. The fact is, that the appearance of great teachers and heroes has almost universally been attributed to 'miraculous' birth, and we know what sort of credence these receive from even the most orthodox. Further, in an age when such a supposition could not have given rise to any difficuly, it would seem very natural to attribute the appearance of a great and wise man to the direct intervention of God. To the Jews, too, it would seem still more natural in the light of their traditions. Moreover, in an age that viewed God as separate from his creatures (as did the early and mediæval Christian ages), a doctrine of

special incarnation would be *required* to invest the person of Christ with authority and protect his 'claims' from desecration. Similarly, to-day, where the unity of God and man is not recognised the doctrine of the Virgin-birth is still in vogue, and that is what I mean when I say that the whole ecclesiastical scheme is based upon this 'miracle.' As it is both weak in evidence, and repugnant to the principles of unity and uniformity it may be counted among the many similar fabrications of the imagination.

The Resurrection.—But the other example selected from this group, the resurrection of Jesus, differs altogether from the above both in its evidence and its nature. And I cannot better illustrate the intricacy of this subject, the impossibility of making round assertions about it, than by stating what I believe respecting the resurrection of Jesus. To begin with, Paul's evidence for it is at least as strong as anything in history. Paul, in an open letter written indisputably not later

than 58 A.D., refers to Christ's having been seen by more than five hundred persons at once, of whom the majority were living at the time he wrote. If we admit the testimony of history at all, we are bound to admit that an event or a series of events of a striking and unusual character occurred on and after the first Easter Sunday. The question is, *What was the event?*

You know what controversies have raged round this subject during the past century; you are familiar with the various hypotheses that have been launched from time to time to account for the alleged facts, and a recapitulation of them here would only confuse the issue. What are the alleged facts at our disposal? (1) that Jesus *died;* of this there can be (within the evidence) no sort of doubt; (2) that three days afterwards he was 'seen' by most of those who had known him; (3) that he continued to be 'seen' up to *and after* his alleged ascension; (4) that these appearances were paradoxical in character,

now seeming to imply physical procedure, now a condition inconsistent or incompatible with the physical: and (5) that they were visible only to those who either knew and loved him, or else to persons of an intensely religious temperament.

The question now before us is, was this an actual physical 'resurrection,' or are there any other facts known to us of a similar kind with which it can be correlated so as to remain historically true though its physical character has to be abandoned?

I think there are such facts. It is a matter of daily occurrence that persons deceased or absent become visible to others to whom they were or are strongly attached. A large body of evidence, the bulk of which is at least as indisputable as that for the 'resurrection,' has been collected on this subject. According to that evidence, persons who receive intimations of this kind are for the time being in an abnormal condition, and by some law or laws as yet unformulated the

mental impression stimulates the optic centre just as in ordinary circumstances do physical impressions, so that the result has exactly that paradoxical character that marks the events in the gospels. Now (granted the immortality of Jesus) what is more probable than that 'the ardent love of his magnetic personality should communicate the fact of his continued existence to his followers' and to others, zealous, like himself, for the advance of righteonsness, that in a state of exaltation their mental impressions, suffused with strong emotional light, should take sensible form, and that overcome with love and awe, they should seem in actual physical contact with a 'risen' Person.

Bearing in mind the alleged facts at our disposal above enumerated, I cannot help feeling that both sides of the great Nineteenth Century Controversy have been in error, both those who denied the resurrection *in toto*, and those who championed a

physical resurrection, and that the above suggestion, which Mr. Stopford Brooke put forward some years ago, is a more probable interpretation of the facts.

Objections considered.—Possibly you may say that I am simply substituting one 'miracle' for another. If you think so, it is because I have not made myself clear. We have to deal with a mass of phenomena which are as yet on the frontier of the inductive province. No general law has yet been framed to 'account' for them. It is therefore a question of *choice between two explanations*; and when an event admits of two explanations the less improbable one should be chosen. Now, the moment death takes place, dissolution commences. Three hours after the heart has ceased to beat, it would involve just as considerable a reversion of the operation of Nature to set it beating again, to restore the functions to vitality, as it would after three days or three years. If then the course of Nature is arrested in

one instance and not in others the principle of Uniformity is at an end, and we live in a universe of caprice. By all means let this be granted if you are prepared to follow out the consequences to their logical conclusion and to live in a world of absolute uncertainty. But if you accept the principle of uniformity, if you believe that when you put one foot before the other in succession you will walk and not fly ; and that when you add two to two the result will be four, you must at least admit that the resurrection of any single person is an improbability—a very great improbability.

At the same time the facts remain in all their stubbornness awaiting explanation, and the inference I have endeavoured to draw from them is not improbable inasmuch as it is borne out by a number of occurrences which, though they do not yet admit of being formulated, are matters of fairly general experience, and indicate the operation of laws which we may not despair of

seeing ultimately formulated. As, then, a question of choice between two explanations I find the one improbable, the other probable.

But, again, you may object that my 'probable' explanation is only the old 'hallucination' theory in a different guise. Again, I can only regret to have misled you, for I regard the appearance of Jesus after his death, though non-physical, to have been the very opposite of 'hallucination,' and as but one of a number of examples of the *reality* of the spiritual life.

Once more, some one may possibly say: 'the demand upon belief is no greater in respect of physical resurrection than in that of the view you put forward. Let us believe the former, or, if we cannot, let us simply disbelieve it.' To this I reply that the demand upon belief *is* greater in the case of an improbability than of a probability. The most rigorous aspect of the principle of Uniformity still leaves margin for demand

on belief, and it is eternally true that 'we live by faith.' But there is a wide difference between faith and imagination; the one affords a basis of reasonable belief, the other is a substitution for reasonable belief. Our principal danger to-day lies in a want of sensitiveness to that difference, in a temper which virtually says: 'we cannot be *certain*, therefore we may just as well imagine as reason.' But well-attested facts are not so easily disposed of, and the hap-hazard temper just indicated, if employed in the province of daily life, would simply lead to a dead-lock. It is certainly easy enough to profess a belief in a physical resurrection, if 'it does not much matter what you believe,' though in that case 'belief' is robbed of all meaning; it is easy to deny any sort of individual survival whatever and some find it easy, while shrewdly suspecting the latter, to outwardly hold the former from ulterior motive. I myself can neither accept the extreme right, nor the extreme left, nor can I

acquiese in a devitalising compromise. A well-attested fact must be capable of some explanation, and I only plead for a little of that exact and patient dealing demanded by the procedure of daily life in the consideration of facts which, cast aside in an ignoble spirit of impatience, or viewed wrongly from partizan motives, are lost to the bulk of our knowledge.

There are two other matters affected by this principle of Uniformity: those of Providence and Prayer.

Providence and Uniformity.—The old idea of arbitrary Divine interference is recognised throughout the Prayer Book. I have come to regard such specific and material benefits as are there enjoined to be prayed for, as determined by a series of occurrences which it were folly to imagine can be modified. Rain or shine, peace or war, plenty or scarceness, these and other blessings and fatalities depend for their occurrence on a long and complex series of phenomena which

operate quite independently of the desire of any individual or group of individuals. The government of the world—so far as we can understand it—is strictly impartial. Often in the larger purposes of the divine working the individual suffers in a manner that seems to us cruel and wanton, and until we realize our own (physical) insignificance we shall have to smother our rebellion under the fantastic consolations of theology. That is not an attitude worthy of the large trust reposed in us by the Father who 'maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust' in order that our moral attitude may not be affected by any material consideration. This is the message Christ gave us, and on this impartial principle he sought to base human justice. Conjointly with the principles of unity and uniformity it strikes at the root of the theory of 'special providence.' The people who think that Heaven is a bank at which they have unlimited

credit, and that, as long as they keep on good terms with the manager, no advance will be refused, hold a morality that does not essentially differ from that of the inhabitants of Tala Mungongo.

To imagine that God rewards those who have goodness with material prosperity, and takes their side against the odds of their oppressors or adverse circumstances is a notion subversive of all active morality. We can only do right on the plain understanding that by so doing we are not likely to be one whit better off materially than if we did wrong. By this we are put upon our mettle, and the ancient response 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him,' must be our temper if our lives are to be worthy and true.

Similarly, with regard to the evil we do, it must and will work out its own results, not only in ourselves but in others. There is no such thing as 'the remission of sins.' Sow to the flesh, you reap the flesh; sow

the spirit, the harvest will be spiritual. We know where we are. If the debauched, worn-out sinner could by repentance or any other arbitrary method obtain the renewal of his youth what a world we should live in! As it is, we certainly know (granted the spread of knowledge) what to expect. If we choose the better part, it *cannot* be taken from us; if we say to evil: 'be thou my good,' no miracle will respond to our bitter cry when we see Nemesis approaching. Our whole future is latent in our acts now, and the destiny of thousands of years could be precipitated (so to speak) on an analysis of our present condition. The responsibility this knowledge brings with it is stupendous. 'Responsibility!' you say, 'but if this is so, then surely our present acts are the result of a like accumulation of factors in the past, and how then can we be free?' No doubt several of our actions are largely determined by the bias of pre-existing action, but is there not always an alter-

native? At all events we always act on that supposition. The fact that we make only *one* of two or more choices does not interfere with our freedom to make another. We are always *more or less* free, and I need not remind you that the supposition underlies all our criminal procedure.

Prayer and Uniformity.—Is there, in this uniform scheme, any place for Prayer? The answer turns on what is meant by Prayer. In the *petitionary* sense I firmly believe not; in the sense of *communion* or *correspondence* with the Father I as firmly believe there is. Take the former sense: from what I have already said you will gather that we cannot hope for *material* good in answer to prayer, and we must be consistent, for if the physical order of the world cannot be altered to meet our requirements, it is inconceivable that we can obtain moral or spiritual good, since such must be as much under the dominion of law as the weather and economic changes. To

pray for a clean heart or a right spirit is as unreasonable as to pray for a fine day or a fortune. But communion with the Father of spirits will tend to the cleansing of the heart and the renewal of the spiritual life. And in this light I can only reiterate the words of the poet :—

'Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet.'

You remember that beautiful illustration of the true nature of prayer recorded in Tennyson's life, where it is compared to the opening of sluice gates which admit the full flood of ocean to flow over and cleanse the dry river-channel and re-vitalise the surrounding pastures? To my mind prayer is just such an opening of the sluice gates of individual submission, in order that the source and consummation of our being may have free intercourse with our souls :—

'Open, O sluice gates,
Unto my spirit!
I, of mine own self

Shrink into furrows ;
Languid, divided,
Useless, unlovely
Flow my heart's forces ;
Open, O sluice gates !
Then shall the Infinite,
Like a pent ocean,
Reach to the uttermost
Fountains of waters,
And the divided
Purposes mingle,
Lost, yet persisting
Through the vast volume
Of His completeness.'

Thus Prayer seems to me (1) a placing of ourselves in entire submission to the Supreme Will ; and (2) an expression of our absolute dependence upon our Father. I have always thought it remarkable that the model prayer given by Jesus contains only one '*petition*'—relating to daily bread —which is really rather an expression of dependence than a request. And as to Christ's oft-repeated direction to pray 'in his name,' I take it he meant not the

slavish repetition of a mediatorial phrase such as at present concludes almost every Church prayer, but rather a state of mind in ourselves, an entering into agreement with his submissive attitude, and an endeavour to copy the nature of which the 'name' is a symbol.

III.

WHAT IS IMPLIED BY THE EVOLUTIONARY HYPOTHESIS.

I PASS to notice briefly the changes which the evolutionary hypothesis has made in our religious ideas. You will remind me that it is only a hypothesis, *i.e.*, a theory, not proved, but assumed for the purpose of argument; a postulate. True, but then the whole atmosphere, to an extent far beyond the specific bounds of science, is saturated with evolutionary thought. Time forbids me to review the scientific grounds for it. I must limit myself to the changes

it has made. These, so far as religion is concerned, I conceive to lie in certain definite departments: in nature, in which, of course, I include man; in history; in ethics and religion; and in literature.

Its effect on our Conception of Man.— I take it that nowadays the 'special creation' theory has passed into the region of poetry; and that the idea that man is made physically in the image of God is a phase of anthropomorphism too crude to need combating. For a long time theologians held to the *literal* meaning of *Genesis* i. 26; then they retreated into a 'spiritual' interpretation, and held that the 'image' referred to was spiritual, and that there was at any rate a gulf between the 'animals' and man which required a special intervention of divine creativeness to bridge. But bit by bit science has been bridging that gulf until now every man of average education and intelligence believes that all that is included in the sum total of religious consciousness

is the result of a process of development similar, in its own department, to that which has brought, say, the eye to its present state of perfection. The desire to pray, the feeling of reverence, the discernment between right and wrong are the highly-developed products of filial yearning and social convenience. Does this lead to a depreciation of the validity of the religious consciousness? Not for a moment. The fact that sight is the result of the action of light on a nervous centre does not render the eye less useful nor destroy the 'reality' of the objects reflected on the retina.

It is one thing to explain—quite another to 'explain away.' Everything that exists is capable of explanation, *i.e.*, co-ordination with some other thing or group of things. Everything, even

> 'The motion of a hidden fire
> That burns within the breast'

has a cause. If my desire to pray had its origin in pre-natal conditions of being I do

not see that such origin should prevent me from employing prayer in the manner above indicated. On the contrary, I should deem myself as foolish to cease from prayer simply because its probable origin had been traced, as to bandage my eyes, and go through life blindfold simply because they were once mere bundles of sensitive ganglia. If my ideas of right and wrong had their beginning thousands of years ago in a certain crude social code, I fail to see how that fact weakens my desire to do right, or can ease my conscience, or avert Nemesis if I do wrong. It seems a truism, but it is sometimes necessary to point it out, that the study of origins can only have one bearing, *i.e.*, on the origins. We can now resolve every known article of food to its ultimate chemical constituents, yet we still enjoy our meals and derive nourishment from them.

Immortality, 'probation,' rewards and punishments.—The most important religious aspect of man's nature relates to immortality

or his spiritual survival of natural decay. This, as Dr. Momerie so ably pointed out, is hardly second in religious importance to the belief in a personal unity, inasmuch as without such survival, it is difficult to recognize Divine justice in the fact of our existence. Waiving that contention, however, as *a priori*, we have to ask: Has science discovered any demonstrative evidence whereby the belief in immortality is rendered improbable? I can only say that I am unaware of any. Had Science *proved* that this life were all, the discovery would have been invaluable. We should then have said: By no means let us deceive ourselves, nor imagine we can create facts by wishing them to be so; let us live the highest life we can while it is ours to live, differing entirely from the coarse dictum that, as to-morrow we die, we should give up to-day to eating and drinking. Happily, however, no such contention need be ours. We have no scientific reason for contemplating the destruction of

the individual with the dissolution of the body. Further, the cumulative force of the considerations in favour of individual survival is to my mind very great.

As the identity of the individual is maintained throughout a variety of changes during 'life,' I see no reason why it should not survive what is often, in our narrow view, called the 'final' change, since as far as one can see the final dissolution of the body does not differ essentially from the slow dissolution which always accompanies organic life. In a word, there is 'something' that remains constant throughout the variability of phenomena. This, I am aware, does not amount to a demonstration in favour of immortality. From the nature of the case it seems extremely improbable that such a demonstration will ever be made. For experimental demonstration we must await the future, while, materially conditioned as we are, the value of testimony from the unseen world, high though it be, can never amount to a

demonstration. Still, there are far more wonderful things than immortality which are matters of daily demonstration. Anyone who examines the eyeless *amoeba*, and then turns to the complex and delicate mechanism of the human eye cannot fail to be impressed with the remarkable advance which the latter registers in the history of species. And when again we turn from this structural superiority to the number and complexity of the impressions made on the retina, to the endless variety with which they can be combined, and the way in which they survive the actual stimuli and live in the memory in ideas which have nothing to do with the original sense-objects, I think we are bound to feel that it is quite impossible to set any limit to the possibilities of development.

You know my own belief. I believe our life here to be but an episode in a progressive series, the limits of which cannot at present be determined. I would remind

you that I am now in the region of faith, *i.e.*, of non-verified conviction, for the legitimacy of which I gave my reasons some little while back. Such a belief seems the only one that fits in with a belief in the just ordering of the world, and I hold it heart and soul, and, with far more fervour than ever was mine under the old creed, I can say: Let us summon up all the energies of our being, and, with the magnificent inspiration afforded us by the words and example of Jesus, 'lay hold on eternal life.'

But here again you will infer a wide divergence from the old creed. Ecclesiastical Christianity is itself divided on the question whether probation does or does not end with death. No gap could well be wider than that between the Roman and Anglican theory of the future, on the one hand, and that of evangelicalism and the bulk of nonconformity on the other. In opposition to all of these, I find myself obliged to discard the idea of probation

and substitute that of progress. Not that I believe the force of individual responsibility to be weakened, nor that kind of 'probation' destroyed which was his who lived

'As ever in the great Taskmaster's eye.'

But the idea of a final balancing of accounts, and a consequent meting out of 'rewards' and 'punishments,' seems too childish to be worth consideration. What has morality to do with rewards and punishments! Nothing can enhance the value of a good deed to a good man; nor can anything persuade us to praise and magnify the Hooligan because a salutary fear of the cat keeps his brutality within bounds. You do not summon a man at the Police Court for the purpose of according him the law's best thanks for *not* having swindled you. The whole of our law proceeds on the assumption that virtue is its own reward. It is only theology that has resort to oriental and mediæval devices for making us virtuous on good security.

As regards Sin.—But what about the Hooligan? I am afraid there is a dash of him in most of us, and that tendency to 'err and stray' which is so glibly confessed in public worship is no less an integral part of our nature than those we have been considering. Taking our ideal normal state as perfect correspondence in thought and deed with the Supreme Will, as we have an example in Jesus, we cannot but plead guilty to a very abnormal state of affairs. As the cause of this is an error in choice, the logical antidote is the choice of what is right. As the error often proceeds from defective will, or feeling, or understanding, measures must be taken to correct these defective functions. The understanding must be enlightened by education and plain-speaking; the emotions must be touched by love, and the will stimulated and braced by a generous appeal. Usually, these are all acted upon together by some powerful motive or motives such as we find on analysing any case of 'conver-

sion.' I myself believe that the Fatherhood of God, once it is vividly impressed upon the conscience, is, in its love, simplicity, and joy, the all-sufficient motive to lift us above the dominion of self and the desire of the world, and place us on the plane of progressive morality.

I say 'progressive morality' because the righteousness Jesus prescribed utterly transcends the requirements of any 'law' that could be formulated. The Church's custom of reciting the Mosaic decalogue as a criterion of Christian morality, and that, too, in a service intended only for the initiated, is but one instance of the blindness of ecclesiastical Christianity to the moral earnestness of Jesus. True, you may object that it will be well if mankind be brought into line even with the Mosaic decalogue. Quite so; but I do not see what incentive a collection of negative precepts is to afford us in rising above our present level. I rather imagine from the

teaching of Jesus that positive and inexhaustible precepts are needed to provoke that dissatisfaction with self that spurs us to a closer imitation of his example. Men do not want Moses; they want Jesus.

These indications of the new meaning which the old terms 'spiritual nature,' 'sin,' 'the law,' 'judgment,' 'heaven and hell,' come to possess for one are exceedingly fragmentary; but I take it they are sufficiently pronounced to be an answer to those who claim to have discovered some property in old leather, whereby the bottles will not burst nor the new wine be spilled.

As regards the Bible.—The wide series of comparative studies that followed closely upon the inception of the evolutionary hypothesis seemed nothing less than the revealing of a new world wherein were order and beauty such as had not been before. History, the rise and decline of states, the distribution of races, the growth of language, the history of customs, laws,

and ethical theory, the parallelisms in literature and religious aspiration—all these and more beside burst upon us with a sense of exultation which I venture to think not even 'stout Cortez' experienced 'when with eagle eyes he stared at the Pacific.'

One immediate effect of this was to alter our notions regarding the Bible. The old way of viewing it as a book or collection of books *sui generis* has slowly yielded before what is somewhat vaguely known as 'the higher criticism' until now the late Master of Balliol's contention that 'the Bible should be treated like any other book' is a *fait accompli.* First the absurdity of 'verbal' inspiration was made manifest; then the indisputable fact of historical and scientific error robbed the 'plenary' subterfuge of any serious meaning; then the uncertainty as to the date and authority of many of the books, and the recognition of a large element of foreign influence in them completed the process.

The 'impregnable rock' has yielded to analysis very slowly, but it has been made to disclose its system of strata at last, and we can now correlate the book with other phases of racial thought and feeling. This increases our conviction of the solidarity of the race, and the essential unity of literature and life. Instead of the divine guidance being restricted to one small race and literature we find traces of it wherever the human foot has left impress on the sands of time. Instead of one obscure religion localising the shrine of the Most High, we find a diffusion of the divine spirit everywhere. Instead of '*the* truth,' we find truth; instead of *one* Bible, many.

And yet, even did Ecclesiastical Christianity nowhere extort a belief in the unique character of the Bible, she still continues its sole use in worship just at though the old theory held true in all its narrowness. There is a multitude of persons to-day who find nothing so helpful—outside perhaps the

Gospel narrative and some of the poetic portions of the Hebrew books—as the greater things of modern literature. No age has been so rich in impressive and stimulating utterance as the one preceding our own. Why should we not in a church calling itself 'national' listen at least to the prophecy of Carlyle, and the psalms of William Wordsworth. These things are sometimes quoted with great unction from the pulpit—often enough in a strange context. If they are legitimate in the pulpit, surely they are in the pew, and from the lectern. When one thinks of the vitality that was infused into English religion by the adoption of our native English as the language of devotion in place of the Latin, one cannot help feeling what 'a stream of fresh and free thought' would be turned upon 'our stock notions and habits' by occasionally listening to the Divine message to our own age instead of always to that addressed to a totally different people two or three thousand years ago.

Logically, we are compelled to believe that both are parts of the same continuous divine message; but then that 'logically' explains it, suggesting, as it does so sharp a contrast to that 'want of intellectual seriousness' which has been said to characterize ecclesiasticism in this country.

So though my contention is never likely to come to anything, what can we think of a Church, claiming to be 'national,' claiming to be 'representative,' claiming in the catholic language of one of its modern appraisers to be 'essentially and necessarily a broad Church,' what can we think, I say, of its claim to lead and represent us, when, not only does it close its doors to God's message to our own age, but it cannot even make the best selection of the archaic lore to which it clings; which in place of using one of the world's chief glories, the devotional poetry of this country, employs various selections of either good verse worn out, or else new verse which is doggerel; can it seem strange

after this to reflect that this church has been behind-hand in every great movement for the moral well-being of the nation for more than a hundred years? And in that case, what can we think of the representative character of this 'national' Church?

As regards Creed.—This brings me to my last point: Why is the Church of England thus behind-hand? What is it that, sooner or later, gives to every systematized religion a crystalline and non-expansive character? The question lies quite within the province of evolutionary considerations, since the answer is that the tendency of Ecclesiastical Christianity is to remain stationary, while the tendency of the individual is to progress. In theory, Ecclesiasticism is and must be exclusive. A fixed creed means conformity. Progress—the evolution of thought—means in howsoever slight a degree, non-conformity. You have heard the clash of these opposing forces in the past. You know what they have meant

throughout the Middle Ages, and later. There is no reason why persecution should not go on, no reason why Cardinal Newman's wish for 'a more gloomy and bitter religion' than the present should not be fulfilled, no reason at all, except the fact that while the tendency to progress is universal, the tendency to crystallize is particular and sectarian. It is by their universality that we test the things that are more excellent. Once grant the legitimacy of Creed, and the desire to persecute is legitimate, even laudable. But once throw in your lot with progress, and persecution and creed go to the wall together. You may say that in thus intimately linking persecution with creed, I am guilty of a great libel on the latter. If so, can you tell me that you do not to-day find everywhere a violation of the spirit of Christian love proceeding from the region of Creed—a violation that warps the mind, prejudices the judgment, and stifles the heart? If you

can convince me that the spirit of persecution has gone out with the fires of Smithfield I will give up my contention.

It is a popular belief with a certain class of orator that the root of all bitterness is religion. Such a contention, I imagine, is confined to the public parks. I have nothing to do with its ventilation. But there is quite enough in our life to-day to lend colour to that contention. Nearly all the evils associated with religion, over and above those arising from ingrained hypocrisy are due to the anomaly of a fixed creed: in other words to the fact that while thought and feeling are organic and progressive, there is and always has been a cult at work in opposition to progress. The precepts Jesus left to us expand with our progress, but the formulas of the ecclesiastical cult can never expand, they are not meant to do so. Nevertheless our vital perception of the significance of Christ depends on our progress. We must press

out every way, exploring the height and the depth if we are to 'know the love.' Either, then Christ must go or Ecclesiasticism. Let me quote the words of one who not so many years ago saw this clearly and acted accordingly.

'The mighty conceptions which Christ gave to the world, of the Fatherhood of God, of an universal brotherhood among men, of God incarnate in all men, of the eternal and necessary bond that binds Him to every soul, of an universal Church which embraces all the race, which now exists in idea, but which will be completed in fact in the future. These vast and glorious ideas, the most magnificent conceptions of Christianity, are repressed and stifled by the theory of the Church, and by the exclusive theories of Sects. Church and Sects talk of the Church of God and of the world as if they were two distinct things, not only in fact, but also in idea. Whereas the true view is, as I believe, that the world, all

mankind, is the Church of God; that all men are, in idea, redeemed, but not yet saved, that this idea will be realised, and Humanity, one and all, made the absolute Son of God.'[1]

In such inspiration as resides in these noble words there is nothing repugnant either to progress or to the legacy of expectation which Jesus left us. But if you can imagine them being uttered in any of the well-known centres of ecclesiastical influence, either you do not perceive their drift or my whole contention is at fault.

A plea for frankness.—I have now come to the end of the task I set myself on this last occasion of our meeting together. That purpose, let me remind you, was neither to assail, directly, the doctrine of the Church, nor to state the reasons for my convictions, but simply to set down the latter with as little explanation as was compatible with

[1] Rev. Stopford A. Brooke: 'Reasons for Secession from the Church of England.'

intelligence, and leave you to infer the extent of their divergence from the former. In conclusion, I put it to you whether a man with the kind of belief I have indicated can longer profess allegiance to Ecclesiastical Christianity?

Compromise.—If you have followed the internal history of the Church of England during the latter half of the last century, especially if you have come under the influence of the writings of men like Maurice, Kingsley, and Momerie, you will understand the meaning the word 'compromise' has for a churchman whose opinions have been largely modelled by them. By compromise one understands an arrangement based—roughly speaking—on mutual concessions; in this particular case the Church afforded unique opportunities for service which at one time seemed to me to justify the suppression of some amount of individual conviction. A layman can scarcely understand how easy that process

of justification is in the English Church. Glorying as it does in its 'essential and necessary breadth,' it is very difficult to say what criterion of orthodoxy it possesses, and correspondingly easy to read one's own meaning into its formula without much compunction; and you must remember there are always the advantages of a ready-made organisation to counterbalance any occasional twinge of conscience. I took Orders believing that I could in that way best give to others what I had myself received.

Its effect on the individual.—But as time went on I learned to know the cost of the position so acquired, and to find out the truth of the words, 'There is no honest delight in influence if it is only to be exerted in the sphere of secondary objects, and at the cost of objects that ought to be foremost.' I found myself committed to a view and temper that never could be genuinely my own, and obliged to use a

terminology always inadequate and often misleading. The situation began to tell on my work, for the worst evil of compromise is that against which its subject battles in vain—the arrest of progress and the undermining of principle. A parson's work, with its peculiar difficulties, demands perhaps more than any other the hearty concurrence of his whole soul. Nothing so saps his energies like the haunting surmise that he is acting a part. Good as his intentions may be he finds himself in a false position, and the mind that should be employed in soothing the sick and the troubled is no longer at rest itself.

A general position.—Still, I knew that in this I was not alone, that there were plenty of men whose convictions coincided more or less nearly with my own, and who continued to use the Church's opportunities for usefulness. From time to time I met with quite a number of clergymen whose judgment was in suspense on the subject of miracles,

especially the virgin-birth of Christ and his resurrection, who had long since ceased to hold that the Scriptures are inspired in any especial sense, and to whom the doctrine of the Trinity was an invention of metaphysics. Understand me, I am not for a moment calling in question the honesty of these men. I can judge of none but myself. But while assuming their entire honesty, I cannot blink the fact that the kind of attitude thus assumed would in other departments of life justify a large amount of falsehood and wrong.

How defended.—Their defence was that the question was largely one of terminology, that language follows but tardily on idea, and that in the present flux of ideas consistency in expression is impossible. To my mind this only re-stated, without justifying, the case. It is true that, in everyday speech, we make use of several expressions which are contrary to the facts expressed; *e.g.*, we speak of the 'rising' and 'setting'

of the sun. But, on reflection, such instances present no true analogy, because, while everybody knows that by the alleged motion of the sun we really mean the motion of the earth, every one does *not* know that the archaic phrases of theology are often used to convey a totally different meaning from that which they ordinarily bear. It is not generally understood, *e.g.*, that when I speak of the *only* Son, I mean the *unique* Son; that when I profess the belief that Christ was 'incarnate by the Holy Ghost,' I mean that he was so because all men are so; that when I add 'born of the Virgin Mary,' I mean nothing of the kind. There might be some case for reserve of this kind if a body of teachers were agreed as to the sense in which they held certain doctrines, and that certain expressions which they found it difficult to alter should have a uniform value. Then, the 'language' plea might have some force and the teachers some licence, but I need not

remind you that in the English Church there is no such agreement or uniformity of interpretation.

The difficulty.—For a long time I deliberated. By some I was advised to seek the confidence of my bishop, but having one conscience already, I did not see how the addition of an episcopal one would help me. The whole question turned on the criterion of orthodoxy within the English Church. Was I to compare my convictions with the popular belief? What *was* the popular belief? Was I to follow the interpretations of advanced churchmen? What was I to do? One thing alone I had for my guidance —the fact that a clergyman may go on believing and teaching very much what he pleases until the law of the land steps in to arrest his progress. Apart from the moral inversion of deciding spiritual matters by legal, I felt it extremely improbable that the law of the land would concern itself with my heresy unless its expression took the form

of revolting blasphemy, or some extreme behaviour that would suggest a madhouse.

How settled.—Finally I came to the conclusion that the only satisfactory standard by which to gauge my position was that of the plain meaning of those expressions of faith used in common worship. Here at last I found solid ground. The Creeds—to go no further—must have *some* meaning or their place in worship would be an insult to the Divine Being; on the other hand, the theologian could not say that their meaning is purely technical; or their place there would be an insult to the intelligence of the worshipper. I take it then that their meaning is identical with that commonly ascribed to the same words and phrases when used elsewhere, and reviewing my convictions in the light of that meaning, I came to the conclusion which I have tried to state.

The testing time has been long, and now that the decision has come I realize what a

blank is apparently before me. I do not see how I can claim kindred with any party, and the man to-day who aspires to be of use without a 'party' to all appearance sets his face towards the wilderness. Still, the day for ulterior considerations has gone by with me. I am satisfied that continuance in the Church would be (for me) dishonest, and that must settle it.

I thank you most earnestly for your attention, and ask your pardon if I have seemed to dwell too much on the personal aspect of this matter. As a parting word let me give you something which is not personal—except in so far as it affects each one of us.

The urgent need for frankness.—I am convinced that the whole of religion in this country is suffering from a condition of compromise. The devitalising evidences of it are everywhere—in commerce, in society, in parliament, in home-life, in the individual's own dealing with himself. Much that

passes for the most orthodox view to-day is, as has recently been pointed out, in reality saturated with agnosticism. I was re-reading the other day that last great manual of 'apology'—Mr. Balfour's famous essay; unless I am much mistaken the whole contention of that work is that since no man can really know anything, it is just as well to accept the current creed. The attitude is not unsuggestive of certain recent scenes in the House of Commons. The same 'foundations of belief' would equally support the blessedness of the word Mesopotamia, and invest 'abracadabra' with the dignity of a Shibboleth. Surely we can see through this sort of thing! Surely we can realize that while absolute truth is beyond our approach, every man has light enough in his own convictions to walk by. Are we to shut our eyes to the sun because the pedantry of agnosticism insists on our ignorance of the nature of light! Surely the robustness of English commonsense is

worthy a better fate than this. In God's name, let us know where we are, and act accordingly. Those who sit on the fence, whether in lawn sleeves or political ermine, answer our questions with inuendo. It may be very clever, but it is more suited to a sixth form debating society than to the plain man who believes in God and the English language, and *has* to act for the future in some sort of faith, and who cannot see why the conscience of the nation should be stifled merely to keep up appearances.

Especially conditioned as we are to-day.—The relaxation of moral fibre that accompanies the temper that says it really does not matter in the long run what one subscribes to finds a congenial atmosphere in an age when men's standard, view it as favourably as you may, is a material one, and when their best energies are given up, partly inevitably and partly by preference, to the pursuit of material well-being. Coupled with the cynicism of the philosopher comes

the eager demand of the market-place for a ready-made religion. 'We have no time,' says the representative man of to-day, 'to think things out for ourselves'; and the tendency is to add (though it is not yet actually added): 'Let us have a division of labour; we work for the present, the future we leave in the hands of the priest.' Such is the very possible fate of the religious instinct where it survives; and where it does not survive there will be absolute indifference, with its inevitable deterioration of character. In either case it is character that is threatened, for if religion is to be a concern of the 'next world' merely, and the priest, be he Anglican or Roman, the custodian of that faith that ought to be active throughout the life of every man, our national independence of character is gone —a consummation that would be hailed more devoutly at the Vatican than in quarters nearer home.

The materialising tendency of the age is,

as I have said, in some degree inevitable, but a vigorous individuality may yet be maintained if we can but shake off the *laissez faire* policy with which our convictions are beridden. Let each man feel that to his God he stands or falls, and use all the 'grit' that is in him to carry the conviction through. Has not that been the temper of the noble band of scientific men during the last fifty years, men who, while obliged to renounce the orthodox standpoint, found strength in their convictions, inspiration in their ideal of service. They did not forget that twofold heritage of the patriot—the annals of their native land and the instinct of another country, that is a heavenly; they did not forget that the power that gave victory to our arms and wisdom to our statesmen was the same power that penned Milton's fiery dispatch to the Vatican, that nerved Burke for his conflict for justice against majority, and clothed Wesley with a calm before which howling mobs subsided

—namely, the power of sincerity, the power of which one said long ago: 'Let them be sincere; for sincerity shall make them free.'

Our duty to the future.—Finally, if there is one consideration more eloquent than another for the cause of outspokenness, it is that of our duty to childhood and youth. Some of us know only too well what it is suddenly to emerge from the fairyland of faith into a very different region; and there can be no doubt that such an emergence marks a most critical era in the life of the growing man or woman. Childhood will always largely depend for its moral instruction on fable and myth, and a certain amount of danger will always attend the awaking of the critical faculty, but the danger may be minimised.

For, granting the accessibility of right ideas to the child through the medium of legend and fable, little reaction need be feared so long as the fables in question are not invested with more than their intrinsic

authority—so long, *i.e.*, as the child is not taught to regard them with a literalness beyond all question. Unfortunately, at the present time the imagination of childhood is fed from two sources, and the child is taught to discriminate between, say, the giant-killer, or the Knights of the Round Table, and the story of Eden, of the Flood, of a juvenile version of what goes on in the Trinity. The former are told frankly as fairy-tales; the latter as literally true, as portions of 'God's Word' the literalness of which must never be doubted. But, sooner or later, it is doubted, sooner or later the stories emphasized by the most solemn associations are discovered to be in all respects on a par with the giant-killer and the adventures of Arthur's Knights, and then comes the danger; for in at least seven cases out of ten the lessons inculcated, the moral bias created by these stories, will vanish along with the fictitious authority claimed for them. A period of 'scepticism' is inevit-

able, and small wonder will it be if the sophistry of sense, ever ready to exploit the passing doubt, seizes upon this abuse of confidence and turns it into an engine for the soul's perversion.

In claiming, then, for the Bible stories a literalness denied to homely legend and fable, and in so teaching them to our children, and basing the chief part of morality upon them, we are really playing into the hands of 'the spirit that denies' and undermining the moral health of future generations.

Nor does this danger only affect those who are at present children amongst us. There are in England to-day thousands—hundreds of thousands—of youths who have been shocked out of all open profession of religion by the duplicity of religious teachers. I use the word 'duplicity' deliberately; it *is* duplicity when a man professes in public adherence to a doctrine of which he holds a version so contradictory

that to call it 'esoteric' would be hyperbolic in the last degree. I am speaking from practical experience. I know what this kind of thing results in. It alienates the youth of the land from all manful participation in religious aims and moral causes. It is the explanation of the oft-repeated question: Why don't we see more young men in our churches? Why?—Because they feel that the pulpit rests upon a false position. One of the healthiest signs of the times is the turning away of our young men from Ecclesiastical Christianity.

But, meanwhile, where *are* they? Alas, to be cast out of the synagogue is not always to be found near the Master; but if self and sense and the world allure our youth to their fatal embrace, does not the fault lie with those Rabbis whose theory of reserve is every whit as hollow as that of their fore-runners in the days of Christ?

No wonder that 'many are weak and

sickly among' us 'and many faint'; no wonder that the religious world is crying out for a 'revival, and the political world for a leader; that the righteous cause languishes, that self-interest and mammon are well-nigh triumphant; and that from the orthodox pulpits in our land we hear bewailed 'indifference,' 'moral anarchy,' and the difficulty of reaching the careless and dissipated. Let those who thus bewail the state of their countrymen themselves renounce their false position, and let judgment begin at the house of God. From one thing only can we hope for renewed moral stamina at this crisis in our country's history, and that is in *absolute sincerity.*

THE END.

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